

# Waxiang Chinese

**Waxiang** (simplified Chinese: 瓦乡话; traditional Chinese: 瓦鄉話; pinyin: *wǎxiānghuà*; *ɕioŋ˧tɕsa˧˥*) is a divergent variety of Chinese,<sup>[2][3]</sup> spoken by the Waxiang people, an unrecognized ethnic minority group in the northwestern part of Hunan province, China. Waxiang is a distinct language, very different from its surrounding Southwestern Mandarin, Xiang and Qo Xiong languages.

Contents

Classification

Distribution

Conservative features

Waxiang and Caijia

See also

References

External links

## Classification

As noted by Laurent Sagart (2011)<sup>[4]</sup> and others,<sup>[5][6][7]</sup> Waxiang appears to share some words with the Caijia language of western Guizhou. Sagart (2011) considers Caijia to be a sister of Waxiang. Currently, Waxiang is classified as a divergent Chinese variety rather than a non-Sinitic language.<sup>[2][3]</sup> Similarities among Old Chinese, Waxiang, Caijia, and Bai have also been pointed out by Wu & Shen (2010).<sup>[8]</sup>

Qu & Tang (2017) show that Waxiang and Miao (Qo Xiong) have had little mutual influence on each other.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Distribution

Waxianghua is found in Luxi, Guzhang and Yongshun counties in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Zhangjiajie prefecture-level city (in Dayong 大庸), and Chenxi, Xupu and Yuanling counties in Huaihua prefecture-level city. Neighboring languages include Southwestern Mandarin, Xiang Chinese, Tujia, Qo Xiong, and Hm Nai.

- "hua" means *speech* in Mandarin Chinese,

Waxiang

Waxianghua, Wogang

瓦鄉話/瓦乡话

*wǎxiānghuà*

Native to

China

Region

western Hunan

Native speakers

(300,000 cited 1995)<sup>[1]</sup>

Language family

Sino-Tibetan

▪ Sinitic

▪ (unclassified)

▪ **Waxiang**

Language codes

ISO 639-3

wxa

Glottolog

waxi1236 (<http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/waxi1236>)



Dialect map of Hunan. Waxianhua is the bit of dark blue in the medium blue (SW Mandarin) just above the red (Xiang)

- "xiang" means *rural* in Mandarin Chinese
- "wa" means *speech* in Southern Chinese dialects.

The word Wa 瓦 is only a phonetic transcription.

Wu & Shen (2010) report Waxianghua to be spoken in the following villages.

- Yuanling County: Qingshuiping 清水坪, Maxipu 麻溪铺, Taichang 太常, Wusu 乌宿, Liangshuijing 凉水井
- Luxi County: Basheping 八什坪, Shangbao 上堡, Liangjiatan 梁家潭, Baisha 白沙镇
- Guzhang County: Linchang 林场 of Gaowangjie 高望界, Gaofeng 高峰 (in Taojin 淘金村, Beishuiping 北水坪, etc.), Yantouzhai 岩头寨, Shanzao 山枣, Yezhu 野竹, Hepeng 河蓬, Caotan 草潭
- Chenxi County: Tianwan 田湾, Banqiao 板桥, Chuanxiyi 船溪驿, Tanjiafang 谭家坊
- Xupu County: Rangjiayi 让家溪, Daweizi 大渭溪, Muxi 木溪
- Yongshun County: Limin 里明村, Zhenxi 镇溪, Xiaoxi 小溪 of Wangcun Township 王村镇

Liubaohua 六保话, a dialect closely related to Waxianghua, is spoken in several villages in southeastern Guazhang County (including in Shaojitian Village 筲箕田村, Shanzao Township 山枣乡) and parts of Luxi County.<sup>[10]</sup> Liubaohua is spoken in the following locations (Zou 2013).

- Guzhang County
  - Shanzao Township 山枣乡: Huoma 火麻村, Gaozhai 高寨村, Shaojitian 筲箕田村, Modao 磨刀村
  - Yantouzhai Township 岩头寨乡: Yinping 银坪村, Zimuping 梓木坪村, Wangouxu 碗沟溪村, etc.
- Luxi County: Basheping Township 八什坪乡
- Yuanling County: Maxipu Town 麻溪铺镇 and Shaojiwan Town 筲箕湾镇

## Conservative features

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Waxiang preserves a number of features of Old Chinese not found in most modern varieties of Chinese, such as the initial \*l- (which became a voiced dental stop in Middle Chinese):<sup>[11]</sup>

- Guzhang li<sup>6</sup>, 地 OC (Baxter–Sagart) \*l<sup>ɿ</sup> ejs > MC *dijH* > Mandarin *dì* 'earth, ground'
- Guzhang lu<sup>6</sup>, 大 OC \*l<sup>ɿ</sup> ats > MC *dajH* > Mandarin *dà* 'big'
- Guzhang li<sup>2</sup>, 遲 OC \*l<sup>ɿ</sup> əj > MC *drij* > Mandarin *chí* 'slow'
- Guzhang lu<sup>7</sup>, 讀 OC \*C.l<sup>ɿ</sup> ok > MC *duwk* > Mandarin *dú* 'read'

Waxiang also has some cases of /z/ for Old Chinese \*r- (which became /l- in Middle Chinese):<sup>[12]</sup>

- Guzhang za<sup>2</sup>, 梨 OC \*C.rəj > MC *lij* > Mandarin *lí* 'pear tree, pear'
- Guzhang ze<sup>2</sup>, 來 OC \*mə.r<sup>ɿ</sup> ək > \*r<sup>ɿ</sup> ə > MC *loj* > Mandarin *lái* 'come'

In a number of words, Waxiang and Proto-Min have affricate initials where Middle Chinese has *sy-*:<sup>[13]</sup>

- Guzhang *tsu*<sup>3</sup>, pMin *\*tʃy*<sup>B</sup>, 水 OC *\*s.turʔ* > MC *sywɨjX* > Mandarin *shuǐ* 'water'
- Guzhang *tsiəu*<sup>1</sup>, pMin *\*tʃy*<sup>A</sup>, 書 OC *\*s.ta* > MC *syo* > Mandarin *shū* 'writing'

In some words, Waxiang and Proto-Min have voiced affricates where Middle Chinese has *y-*:<sup>[14]</sup>

- Guzhang *dzoŋ*<sup>3</sup>, pMin *\*-dʒioŋ*<sup>B</sup>, 癢 OC *\*Cə.ɡaŋʔ* > MC *yangX* > Mandarin *yǎng* 'itch'

## Waxiang and Caijia

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Sagart argues that Waxiang and Caijia together constitute the earliest branching of Chinese. Like Waxiang, Caijia preserves Old Chinese *\*l-*, has a voiced fricative reflex of *\*r-*, and retains the Old Chinese word 字 'love', which has been replaced by 愛 in all other Chinese varieties. Waxiang and Caijia also share two words not found in other Chinese varieties:<sup>[4]</sup>

- 'two': Caijia *taɿ*, Waxiang *tsoɿ*, from Old Chinese 再 *\*tsʰəs* 'twice'
- 'milk': Caijia *miɿ*, Waxiang *miɿ*, which Sagart suggests is a non-Sinitic word

## See also

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- Badong Yao language
- Yeheni language

## References

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11. Baxter & Sagart (2014), p. 109.
12. Baxter & Sagart (2014), p. 110.
13. Baxter & Sagart (2014), p. 93.
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## External links

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- Hilary Chappell (2012), "Typology of an isolated Sinitic language: Waxiang, a language of northwestern Hunan, China" (<http://portal.cohass.ntu.edu.sg/ICSTLL45/Documents/ICSTLL45%20H.%20Chappell%20final.pdf>) (presentation slides), keynote at *45th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics*.
  - Greater Bai comparative vocabulary list on Wiktionary
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